



**Office of the Attorney General
Robert E. Cooper, Jr.**

**Department of Commerce and Insurance
Commissioner Paula Flowers**

CONSUMER ALERT

Office of the Attorney General
P.O. Box 20207 Nashville, TN 37202-0207

Department of Commerce and Insurance
Division of Consumer Affairs
500 James Robertson Parkway Nashville, TN 37243

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Dec. 4, 2006
#06-41

CONTACT:
Sharon Curtis-Flair
(615) 741-5860

USE CARE WHEN HOLIDAY SHOPPING ONLINE

With the holiday shopping season in full swing, many consumers may choose the convenience of shopping on the Internet. To ensure your online buying experience is safe and satisfying, Attorney General Bob Cooper and Mary Clement, director of the Division of Consumer Affairs, caution Tennesseans to use savvy when shopping the Internet.

“While this time of year can be hectic,” Attorney General Cooper said, “taking a little extra time to make sure you’re getting what you’re paying for when shopping on the Internet can go a long way toward a safer and more stress-free experience.”

*Know the party with whom you are dealing. Confirm the online seller’s physical address and telephone number, in case you have problems or questions. While browsing, you may get an email or pop-up message asking for personal or financial information. Do not reply or click on the link in the message. Legitimate companies do not ask for this information via email. If you have not done business with the seller before, you should consider checking with the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs and the applicable Better Business Bureau to determine how many complaints (if any) have been filed against the company before making a purchase.

*Know exactly what you are buying. Carefully read the seller’s description of the product closely, especially the fine print. Be wary of deals that sound too good to be true. Words to watch for include such descriptions as “vintage,” “in original packaging,” “liquidated,” “returned” or

“refurbished,” which may mean used or in undesirable condition. Be wary of sellers who fail to provide detailed descriptions of their products - they may have something to hide. You should carefully watch for “as is” type disclaimers. This is especially true since in an Internet shopping experience you are not physically able to inspect the goods before you buy.

*Find out exactly what it will cost. Be sure to factor shipping and handling into the total cost of the order while comparing prices. Make sure the seller is not offering you a great deal for the product, but then charges an exorbitant shipping fee. Do not pay for your purchase by sending cash, check or using money wire services for online purchases. Credit cards offer charge back rights of dispute available under federal law, which only provide protection for credit card purchases. You also have added protection when using reputable online payment processors.

*Make sure you know all the terms of the deal. Educate yourself regarding the seller’s return and refund policies and time required for delivery. Can you return the item for a full refund if you are not satisfied? Find out who pays the shipping costs on returned items, and if the seller charges a restocking fee. Find out how long shipping will take. An FTC rule requires sellers to ship items as promised, or within 30 days of the order date if no specific date is promised.

*Keep a paper trail. Print and save records of your online transaction, including the product description and price, any confirmation or order number provided by the seller, the online receipt and any email exchanges you may have with the seller. Check your credit card or bank account statements for unauthorized charges, especially small charges from companies you don’t recognize. Busy holiday shopping months like November and December are favorites of scam artists, who bury unauthorized charges into long credit card statements. Try to use the same credit card for Internet purchases if possible to keep up separately with charges.

*Use care when disclosing financial information while making your purchase. If you initiate a transaction and need to provide financial information such as your credit card number, look for indicators that the site is secure, such as a padlock icon on the browser’s status bar or a URL that begins “https” (the “s” stands for secure). Do not email financial information such as your checking account number or Social Security number.

*Check the privacy policy. This policy should let you know what personal information is being collected, why it is being collected and how it is going to be used. If you cannot find a privacy policy, or cannot understand it, consider taking your business elsewhere.

If you have a complaint about an online seller or any consumer matter, you may file a complaint by contacting the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs at www.state.tn.us/consumer or by calling 1-800-342-8385 (toll free). You can also file complaints online with the Internet Fraud Complaint Center at www.ifccfbi.gov/index.asp and with Consumer Sentinel at www.consumer.gov/sentinel/.